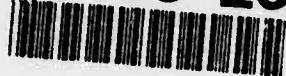


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GORBACHEV'S PRESIDENTIAL COUNCIL

Theodore Karasik and Brenda Horrigan

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GORBACHEV'S PRESIDENTIAL COUNCIL

by Theodore Karasik and Brenda Horrigan¹

Introduction

Mikhail Gorbachev and his supporters have directed many dramatic changes in the Soviet political system over the past few years. The cumulative effect of these reforms, which is now becoming apparent, is the transfer of governing authority from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) to "law-based," Constitutionally-mandated executive and legislative branches of government.

The first step in the transfer of power was the reorganization and democratization of the Soviet legislature. In March 1989 the Soviet people had their first opportunity in over 70 years to send the delegates of their choice to Moscow as their legislative representatives. Although these first elections were subject to various "undemocratic" constraints--such as guaranteed blocs of delegates for certain organizations--this election marked a dramatic step toward truly representative government. The 2250 deputies within the Congress of People's Deputies then elected from their ranks 542 representatives to a standing legislature, a new Supreme Soviet. While the new Supreme Soviet shares its name with the pre-Gorbachev legislative body, it is in almost all respects a different organization, the most fundamental difference being that the new Supreme Soviet has an influential voice in the management of the Soviet state.²

In the first quarter of 1990, Gorbachev oversaw two additional steps in the complete reorganization of the Soviet political system. The creation of the Executive Presidency and the Presidential Council has further removed the CPSU and its leading organs--the Politburo and Secretariat--from the job of running the Soviet state. This was made convincingly clear by the revamping of the Politburo at the recent 28th CPSU Congress which involved most notably the removal of all key government officials (except Gorbachev) from membership in the Politburo.

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²For more information on the powers of the reformed legislative bodies, see *Pravda*, 27 December 1989, pp. 1-2.

Background

In late 1989, Gorbachev reversed his position on the desirability of or need for an Office of the President. He had apparently realized by this time that to work through the party or legislature would be too slow and ineffective. On February 27, 1990 the Supreme Soviet voted in favor of a Gorbachev proposal to create a new Office of the President. Within a matter of weeks, the new post was written into the Soviet Constitution by the Congress of People's Deputies. Gorbachev--whom the Supreme Soviet selected to serve as the first Soviet president--was sworn into office on March 15th.³ Not long thereafter, President Gorbachev announced his first appointments to a new advisory body, the Presidential Council.

The creation of the Office of the President and the Presidential Council is important for several reasons. First, it significantly strengthens Gorbachev's official position. By creating (and having himself elected to) the Presidency, Gorbachev frees himself from Party threats to his claim as leader of the Soviet Union. Even were he to lose his post as party General Secretary, Gorbachev would remain head of state until 1995--something which would not have been possible just a few months ago.⁴

The Presidency and the Presidential Council are also important in that they free Gorbachev from reliance on the CPSU apparatus: the Presidential Council provides Gorbachev with a body of advisers, spokesmen for various political and national groups, and substantive experts independent of the Central Committee departments⁵ and the Secretariat.⁶ In other words, the Presidential Council contains the elements which any head of state needs to operate effectively: loyalty, knowledge, and sensitivity to the constituency.

Because of their autonomy from the party, the post of President and the Presidential Council should allow Gorbachev to more effectively formulate and implement his political

³Gorbachev did not receive a stunning endorsement at the election. He received only 1,329 votes out of a possible 2,245. Beginning in 1995, the Soviet president will be elected by the population at large.

⁴The Presidency is, long-time Gorbachev adviser Aleksandr Yakovlev explains, "a certain completion of the ladder of popular power." *Moscow World Service* in Russian, 0935 GMT, 30 April 1990. Reported by FBIS in *Soviet Union: Daily Report*, 1 May 1990, pp. 55-56. [FBIS-SOV-90-084]

⁵The exception here is Boldin, who, as head of the CPSU Central Committee General Department, will probably act as the Presidential Council's watchdog over the Central Committee apparatus.

⁶According to Article 127(5) of the Law on the Presidency, the role of the Presidential Council, which "operates under the president" is to develop proposals for Soviet domestic and foreign policy. *Izvestiya*, 6 March 1990, pp. 1-2.

and economic reforms.⁷ As Presidential Council member Aleksandr Yakovlev put it, the "introduction of the presidency is a fundamental transition from collective indeterminateness to personal responsibility."⁸ Gorbachev's new role as president frees him from his former status as General Secretary as only "first among equals" on the Politburo, and it ascribes to him the personal authority to make and execute national policy. The Presidential Council frees Gorbachev from reliance on the party bureaucracy for his reform program and provides him with an independent source of ideas and expertise.

The Presidency and Presidential Council are important for another reason. They represent--as a senior Soviet military officer recently noted--"an important stage on the path of creating a state which operates on rule-of-law principles."⁹ Creation of a state governed by the rule of law is a goal long promoted by Gorbachev and his supporters. The Office of the President and the Presidential Council are "law-based" posts, that is, they are specifically provided for in the Soviet Constitution.

At this early stage, it is difficult to tell exactly how the Presidential Council will effect policymaking in the USSR. It is a large body and contains experts in diverse fields and representatives of a wide range of viewpoints. This note attempts to explain the role of the Presidential Council in the new Soviet political system by examining the place of the Council in the party/government structure and by taking a look at the individuals who will now seem to have the greatest influence on President Gorbachev's future policies.

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⁷Until the creation of the Office of the President, leadership decisionmaking--that is, decisionmaking in the Politburo--was by consensus. As Chief of the General Staff M.A. Moiseyev noted in a recent interview, "Our many years of experience of collegial leadership have shown very often that it is not efficient enough..." *Krasnaya zvezda*, 16 March 1990, p. 2.

⁸Quoted by TASS correspondent in *Izvestiya*, 7 April 1990, p. 2.

⁹*Krasnaya zvezda*, 16 March 1990, p. 2.

Why a Presidential Council?

As noted above, one of Gorbachev's primary motivations for creating the Executive Presidency and the Presidential Council was to circumvent the obstacles to reform placed in his path by the CPSU leadership and bureaucracy. The events at the July 1990 Party Congress publicly confirmed what Gorbachev has long known: by and large, the CPSU leadership and apparatus is a major impediment to implementing radical economic and political reforms in the USSR.

Gorbachev has frequently noted the problem of party resistance to his program. His 1988 reorganization of the CPSU Central Committee apparatus--most notably, the establishment of Central Committee commissions--was an early experiment to overcome resistance to new reforms.¹⁰ It is apparent that continued resistance to reform within the party bureaucracy--and increasingly vocal dissent in the top levels of the party--forced Gorbachev to realize that *perestroika* (restructuring) of the Soviet system demanded the CPSU be removed from direct policy decisionmaking and implementation. As Presidential Council member Stanislav Shatalin suggested in a March 1990 interview, party resistance to Gorbachev's reforms is being eliminated because the Presidential Council now links the President directly with government organs. Shatalin then very bluntly pointed out that conservatives no longer could--at any level of the party--prevent adoption and implementation of reform policies:

[Shatalin]: People occupying key posts in the state now find themselves directly subordinate to the president via the council.

[Interviewer]: Without a "buffer" in the form of the Politburo?

¹⁰In 1988, Gorbachev drastically cut back the overgrown party apparatus and slashed the number of Central Committee apparatchiks. He then established six commissions, each of which was to oversee a particular policy area (legal issues, socioeconomic issues, etc.). Gorbachev then made sure that the chairmanship of each commission was filled by a Politburo member. In short, the 1988 reform was a clear effort to better communicate Gorbachev's reform plans to the party apparatus and to better oversee reform implementation.

[Shatalin]: Yes, directly. This will accelerate the implementation of instructions issued by the head of state and will ensure collegiality in operational decisions, and--the main thing--will increase the responsibility of these persons to the USSR Supreme Soviet, the Constitutional Oversight Committee, and other democratic institutions...¹¹

As noted earlier, Gorbachev's plan to establish an Executive Presidency and a Presidential Council also fits logically into his goal to transform the Soviet Union from a party- and personality-dominated system to a system governed by the "rule-of-law." Part and parcel of this objective is the need to restore the Soviet people's faith in their leadership. In fact, in a March 1990 interview, Presidential Council member Veniamin Yarin said he believed the chief task of the Presidential Council to be to "revive the prestige of power" and "ensure that people believe that the presidency will act in the name of the people and for the people."¹²

As Gorbachev himself has stated, the Presidency and Presidential Council represent "our new statehood":

I am convinced that in the long run the success of perestroika can be ensured by consistently implementing a policy that develops and deepens democratic processes in our society...It is in this context that the establishment of the Soviet socialist presidency should be viewed. This is not the revival of personal power in a new form.

...We have...experienced a new way of organizing the economic, social and political spheres of society. There are legal and economic prerequisites in the form of laws that have already been passed and legal acts that are being formulated. Our federation will be profoundly transformed on their basis.¹³

Gorbachev has also impressed on the Presidential Council members their need to emphasize "rule-of-law" in their own actions and in Soviet society:

The president and, naturally, the Presidential Council should focus all their

¹¹*Literaturnaya gazeta*, #13, 28 March 1990, p. 1.

¹²*Rabochnaya Tribuna*, 27 March 1990, p. 1.

¹³*Pravda*, 28 March 1990, p. 1.

activities on the observance of laws. We shall not make further headway in reforms or in democratic development if legal nihilism continues to reign supreme in society.¹⁴

The Soviet president is, as Gorbachev's comments suggest, a president of all Soviet citizens, not just of the members of the elite party ranks. Although, as first president, Gorbachev did not face a nation-wide direct election, he was chosen by a body of representatives of the whole of Soviet society. Furthermore, beginning in 1995, the Soviet president will be "elected by USSR citizens on the basis of universal, equal, and direct suffrage by secret ballot..."¹⁵ This is quite a change from the secretive way the past Soviet leaders--that is, CPSU General Secretaries--were chosen and removed from office.

The Presidential Council is another part of Gorbachev's general effort to establish a rule-of-law state. Until very recently, it was difficult to know precisely from whom CPSU General Secretaries took advice. Although the Politburo and General Secretary were known to receive policy proposals from other party bodies, such as the Secretariat and Central Committee departments, it was difficult to tell precisely which advisers the General Secretary relied upon.

The Presidential Council, for the first time, establishes publicly who are the "President's men." As *Komsomolskaya pravda* political commentator S. Kiselev notes:

Until recently our government's advisers remained in the shadow (privy counselors?) and it was only by chance that we were able to learn of the role played by a particular figure in drafting important decisions of the authorities...Now what was "privy" has become "public"...¹⁶

In addition to establishing a legal foundation for the Soviet political system, Gorbachev also needs the Presidential Council to provide him fresh ideas and professional expertise in a variety of fields. The new President also needs to keep one finger on the pulse of his nation. As Yarin noted shortly after his selection as a Presidential Council member:

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵*Izvestiya*, 6 March 1990, pp. 1-2.

¹⁶*Komsomolskaya pravda*, 27 March 1990, p. 1

In order to work out a policy which corresponds to the interests of the people, Mikhail Gorbachev needs unembellished, veracious information from the grass-roots, he said, and we are ready to provide it.¹⁷

CPSU apparatchiks have a stake in maintaining the status quo (and, hence, their position of privilege) in the USSR; the members of the Presidential Council, however, have an interest in supporting the President and helping his programs succeed. Moreover, many of the Presidential Council members are experts in various areas and are now getting a chance to put their ideas into action. A. Kauls, director of a Latvian agricultural complex, for example, has successfully experimented with increasing farm productivity on a local scale.¹⁸ As a Presidential Council member, Kauls now has the chance to implement his most successful farm reforms throughout the nation.

The Presidential Council's Place in the Political System

In terms of the political structure, the Presidential Council body is attached to the Office of the President¹⁹ [See diagram on page 9]. According to Article 127 of the newly-revised Soviet Constitution, the Council's job "is to elaborate measures to implement the basic thrusts of USSR domestic and foreign policy and ensure the country's security." Presidential Council members are chosen by the Soviet president, and there is no legislated limit on the number of members the Council may contain²⁰. No legislative confirmation is required of Presidential Council members.²¹ Apparently, though, members of the legislature may nominate members for presidential consideration.²²

Who is on the Council? President Gorbachev told a *Vremya* correspondent his main criterion in selecting the first Presidential Council members was whether they are "supporters of the policy to which the president himself adheres."²³ Gorbachev, and

¹⁷ *Moscow TASS International Service* in Russian, 0722 GMT, 27 March 1990. Reported by FBIS in *Soviet Union: Daily Report*, 28 March 1990, p. 54. [FBIS-SOV-90-060]

¹⁸ *Komsomolskaya pravda*, 27 March 1990, p. 1

¹⁹ *Vremya*, 27 March 1990.

²⁰ *Komsomolskaya pravda*, 27 March 1990, p. 1

²¹ A recent Soviet article criticized the Presidential Council appointment process. It pointed to the fact that the staff of the U.S. president has grown considerably over the decades and today wields enormous (and unsupervised) power. See *Izvestiya*, 22 March 1990, p. 2.

²² According to one TASS report, Veniamin Yarin was nominated for the Council "along with two others" by "worker deputies" in the Supreme Soviet. Gorbachev considered the three nominations and selected Yarin as his choice for member. *Moscow TASS International Service* in Russian, 0722 GMT, 27 March 1990. Reported by FBIS in *Soviet Union: Daily Report*, 28 March 1990, p. 54. [FBIS-SOV-90-060]

²³ *Moscow Television Service* in Russian 1700 GMT, 27 March 1990. Reported by FBIS in *Soviet*

several Presidential Council members, soon thereafter clarified that he did not mean he did not want independent thinkers. Rather, all members of the Council had to be supportive of the basic tenets of *perestroika*. As Aleksandr Yakovlev explained on a Soviet radio broadcast:

I do not think that the like-mindedness used by Mikhail Gorbachev is on the level of identity of views about the method for solving this or that issue. It shouldn't be like that. You won't get any real, effective improvement on the basis that from the start we do not argue before making a decision...[A]ll members of the Presidential Council confirmed their devotion to perestroika and to the changes taking place in society. There really was unanimity about this idea, which is why Mikhail Sergeyevich had every ground to say what he did.[emphasis added]²⁴

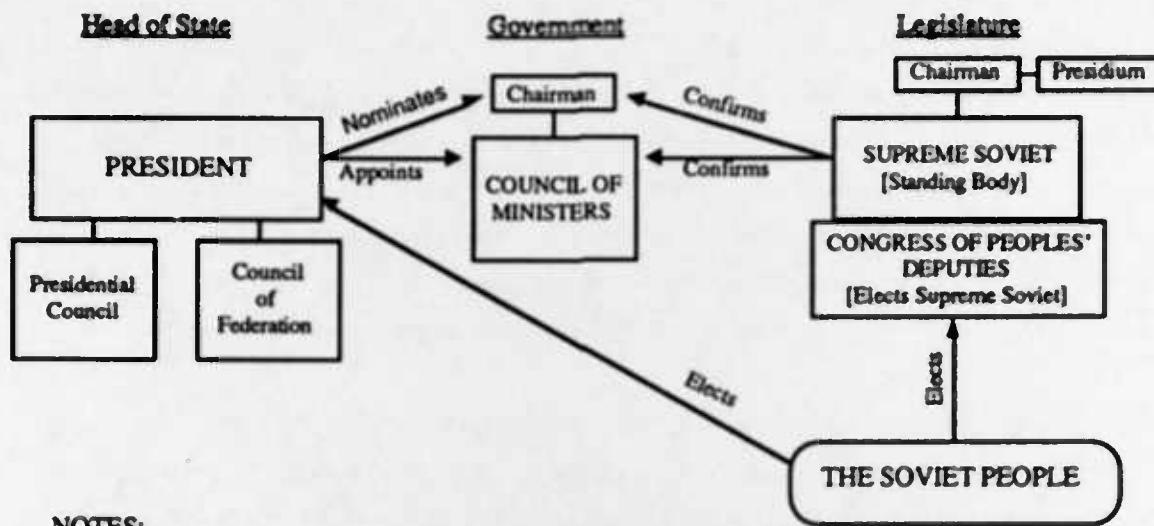
The Presidential Council's agreement with Gorbachev's ideas would become "meaningless--primarily for the President" if membership depended on "'a priori agreement' with Gorbachev's opinions," adds Council member Stanislav Shatalin. "As I see it, like-minded persons share the same approach to strategic ideas and objectives. We may disagree on some things, but we should know precisely where we are going."²⁵

Union: Daily Report, 28 March 1990, pp. 51-53. [FBIS-SOV-90-060]

²⁴ *Moscow World Service* in Russian, 0930 GMT, 1 May 1990. Reported by FBIS in *Soviet Union: Daily Report*, 2 May 1990, pp. 44-45. [FBIS-SOV-90-085]

²⁵ *Moscow News*, #14, 8 April 1990, p. 6.

Current Governmental Structure in the Soviet Union



NOTES:

--Court system is not represented in this chart.

Another factor in selection of Presidential Council members obviously relates to the government posts held by some Council members. For instance, it is hardly an accident that the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense and the Chairman of GOSPLAN are on the Presidential Council. These government leaders are crucial to the development and implementation of national policy. Other selections seem to be aimed at helping Gorbachev stay informed of the desires and concerns of various sectors of society. For instance, writer Valentin Rasputin told a *Literaturnaya gazeta* editor that his presence, and that of Chingis Aitmatov, on the Council was to ensure that the president hear "another language--a writer's language." Also, Rasputin said, he would be able to convey to the president "specific Russian interests."²⁶

Presidential Council member Yarin says part of his job on the Council is to advise Gorbachev on workers' concerns and to be an intermediary between the President and his "voters--workers and members of their families."²⁷ Similarly, the presence of a Latvian, Georgian, Kirghiz, Armenian, and Ukrainian on the Council is probably intended to keep

²⁶*Literaturnaya gazeta*, #14, 4 April 1990, pp. 1, 3.

²⁷*Izvestiya*, 7 April 1990, p. 2.

Gorbachev informed on the nationalities front. The Presidential Council might better be called, says Council member Shatalin, "the Council for National Security and National Consensus," since its job is to "ensure communication" between the president and "the working class, peasantry, and intelligentsia."²⁸

The day-to-day work of the Presidential Council, as described by Gorbachev and the Council members, seems at once straightforward and mind-boggling. The essential job of Presidential Council members--individually and as a group--is to give the president policy alternatives on the multitude of social, economic, foreign and defense policies facing the nation. Its job is also to help the president foresee future problems, both at home and abroad. "It is very important," Council member Rasputin explains, "that the Presidential Council anticipates the probability of a critical situation and warns of its appearance..."²⁹

No matter how strongly its members might feel on certain issues, the Presidential Council has no policy-making authority; it can only advise the president.³⁰ "The right to choose and decide belongs to the president in all cases," according to Council member Yakovlev. The Council's "right and duty" is to develop proposals, promote solutions, and warn the president of likely future issues of concern.³¹ The Council is a "consultative body," Council member and Interior Minister Vadim Bakatin confirmed:

Our prime duty is to be up to our task. Secondly, we must not try to guess the president's views. We must be able to convince him. We must realize that not every decision of the president will be first submitted to the Council.³²

In essence, then, the Council serves 'at the pleasure' of the President; it is consulted only when and if the president feels consultation necessary. When it is consulted, though, it does not merely make suggestions without adopting responsibility for them. On the contrary, according to Shatalin, Presidential Council members are responsible for the "accuracy and effectiveness" of the information they give the president. In addition, if his

²⁸*Literaturnaya gazeta* #13, 28 March 1990, p. 1.

²⁹*Literaturnaya gazeta*, #14, 4 April 1990, pp. 1, 3.

³⁰*Izvestiya*, 7 April 1990, p. 2.

³¹*Moscow TASS* in English, 0935 GMT, 6 April 1990. Reported by FBIS in *Soviet Union: Daily Report*, 9 April 1990, pp. 41-42. [FBIS-SOV-90-068]

³²*Ibid.*

suggestion is adopted by the president, the Council member "must monitor how accurately his advice is implemented." (He also has the chance to "intervene in the process of implementation and correct it if necessary.")³³

The Presidential Council went right to work after the announcement of its creation. Practically speaking, though, it is still in an early stage of development. As Yakovlev noted in a May 1990 radio broadcast, the institution of the presidency is "only just taking shape," and it is "premature" for anyone "to expect some sort of definitive opinions and decisions from each of us now."³⁴ Some very elementary organization-building is still underway. A "suitable building" for the Council had yet to be found as of late June and staff support is still being hired.³⁵ Competent administrative support will be crucial, Gorbachev indicated in his first speech to the Council on March 27, 1990; he told his advisers that they need "a mechanism for analysis, drafting proposals, and control" in order to adequately conduct their business.³⁶ It is planned that each Council member will have his "special groups of experts and technical associates," and that each member will also have staff advisers "whose task will be to prepare each day a very complete and objective picture of the state of society and the life of the country..."³⁷

Member Portfolios

Along with finding office space and hiring researchers and secretaries, at the present moment the President and his Presidential Council are busy sorting their priority issues and assigning members to analyze the problems and develop solutions. The Presidential Council members can be split into three main groups³⁸. [See chart on pages 12-13] The members of the third group seem to have "portfolios" designed to bridge gaps between the Soviet leadership. Writers Aitmatov, who is probably responsible for Islamic affairs, and Rasputin, who seems to represent the views of Russian nationalists, appear to play a special role. For example, Gorbachev sent Aitmatov to calm ethnic tensions in the Osh region of the Kirghiz Republic this summer.³⁹ Rasputin has reflected Russian

³³*Literaturnaya gazeta*, #13, 28 March 1990, p. 1.

³⁴*Moscow World Service* in Russian, 0930 GMT, 1 May 1990. Reported by FBIS in *Soviet Union: Daily Report*, 2 May 1990, pp. 44-45. [FBIS-SOV-90-085]

³⁵*Radio Liberty Daily Report*, 25 June 1990.

³⁶*Pravda*, 28 March 1990, p. 1.

³⁷*Literaturnaya gazeta*, #13, 28 March 1990, p. 1.

³⁸This division into three groups is based on comments made by Gorbachev's press spokesman, Arkadiy Maslennikov. See *Moscow Domestic Service* in Russian, 1800 GMT, 3 April 1990. Reported by FBIS in *Soviet Union: Daily Report*, 4 April 1990, p. 29. [FBIS-SOV-90-065]

³⁹*Moscow Domestic Service* in Russian, 14 June 1990. Reported by FBIS in *Soviet Union: Daily*

nationalist views, for example, through his advocacy of the abolishment of state supervision of religion.⁴⁰ Revenko also appears to have responsibility for nationality issues, although on a more general level, in that he is in charge of drafting a new Union Treaty and is overseeing the debate on the treaty within the Federation Council.⁴¹

Also within the third group is Valeriy Boldin, the only Presidential Council member to retain a post within the CPSU apparatus. As head of the CPSU Central Committee General Department, Boldin will probably act as CPSU liaison for the President. Also in the political relations realm is Primakov, who says he will be in charge of presidential relations with political parties, organizations, parliaments, and the mass media.⁴² Yarin is labor's representative on the Council.

Several Presidential Council members appear responsible for economic issues. Shatalin appears the most reform-minded: he declared his support for radical economic reform at the March 1990 CPSU Central Committee plenum.⁴³ Albert Kauls also supports radical economic reform as it applies to his field of expertise, agriculture. Kauls openly endorses private initiative in farming, as well as economic autonomy for all Soviet republics. He complained to Yakovlev in August 1988 that central authorities had not followed through on their promises to give Latvia increased economic independence.

The members of these groups either chair or lend support to consultancy groups within the Presidential Council. For instance, Gorbachev formed a consultancy group on "Crime and Extremism" immediately after the conception of the Presidential Council. Aleksandr Yakovlev chairs this group, and KGB Chairman Kryuchkov, Minister of Internal Affairs Bakatin, and worker representative Yarin are members. The task of this group seems to be to coordinate efforts to control domestic security problems in light of increasing crime and nationality tensions--"byproducts" of the increased freedoms allowed in Soviet society as a result of *glasnost'* and *perestroika*. The USSR Minister of Justice, the First Deputy Procurator General, and the Deputy Chairman of the USSR Supreme

Report, 14 June 1990, pp. 115-116. [FBIS-SOV-90-115]; *Frunze Domestic Service* in Kirghiz, 14 June 1990. Reported by FBIS in Soviet Union: *Daily Report*, 18 June 1990, p. 120. [FBIS-SOV-90-117]

⁴⁰*Radio Liberty Daily Report*, 11 April 1990. Rasputin has also stated that he will be following environmental issues for the Council.

⁴¹The Federation Council is another new body attached to the Office of the President. It contains the head of the legislature from each Soviet republic. *Vremya*, 15 June 1990; *Los Angeles Times*, 25 July 1990.

⁴²*Radio Liberty Daily Report*, 25 June 1990.

⁴³*Pravda*, 17 March 1990. Shatalin also openly endorsed the presidential system in October 1989, even when Gorbachev was still opposing the idea. See *Literaturnaya gazeta*, #41, 11 October 1989, p. 6.

Court also participate in the group's meetings; they attended the group's first session in June 1990.⁴⁴

(1) MINISTERS AND STATE COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN⁴⁵

- | | |
|----------------------|------------------------------|
| •Vadim Bakatin | Minister of Internal Affairs |
| •Yuriy Maslyukov | GOSPLAN Chairman |
| •Eduard Shevardnadze | Minister of Foreign Affairs |
| •Vladimir Kryuchkov | KGB Chairman |
| •Dmitriy Yazov | Minister of Defense |

(2) ACADEMICS & SCIENTISTS

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|
| •Albert Kauls | Agriculture expert |
| •Yuriy Osipian | Academy of Sciences Vice President |
| •Yevgeniy Primakov | Former IMEMO ⁴⁶ director |
| •Stanislav Shatalin | Economist |

(3) PERSONNEL REPRESENTING SOCIAL AND POLITICAL GROUPS

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| •Chingis Aitmatov | Reformist writer |
| •Valeriy Boldin | Head, CPSU/CC General Department |
| •Vadim Medvedev ⁴⁷ | Former Politburo member, CPSU ideologue |
| •Valentin Rasputin | Conservative writer |
| •Grigoriy Revenko | Former Party First Secretary, Kiev Oblast' |
| •Veniamin Yarin | People's Deputy; leader, United Workers Front |
| •Aleksandr Yakovlev | Former Politburo member |

Other Presidential Council consultancy groups are likely to form. Council member Primakov says he will head a group on foreign policy, which will include the "Prime

⁴⁴*Vremya*, 4 June 1990.

⁴⁵As noted earlier in this article, these state officials now report directly to the Presidential Council and to the President, rather than to the party. It is also important to note that this group of individuals retained their seats in the CPSU Central Committee following the 28th Party Congress, although they did voluntarily relinquish their membership in the Politburo.

⁴⁶Institute of World Economy and International Relations.

⁴⁷Medvedev is the latest addition to the Council; Gorbachev named him a member on 17 July 1990, immediately after his removal from the Politburo. He is responsible for foreign economic relations. See *Moskovskie novosti*, No. 33, 1990.

Ministers, the Defense Minister, and the Foreign Minister.⁴⁸ Another consultancy group being considered would supervise foreign economic problems. This group would be "a mechanism for analysis, drafting mechanisms of control of the whole field of foreign economic relations, including the question of making the rouble convertible."⁴⁹

Replacing the Defense Council?

In addition to its other responsibilities, the Presidential Council's creation coincided with the apparent disbanding of the USSR Defense Council, the high level and once-secretive body in charge of formulating Soviet national security policy for the Politburo leadership. Gorbachev signalled the demise of the Defense Council just before announcing the Presidential Council's creation:

The chairman of the Supreme Soviet used to head the Defense Council. Today the issues of leadership of the Armed Forces and issues of security and defense are included in the president's powers. And I also think that a significant number of figures *who were connected* with the work of the Defense Council will continue to participate and offer their assistance to the president in solving these questions [emphasis added].⁵⁰

In addition, Gorbachev appointed to the Presidential Council key personnel who were believed to have sat on the Defense Council (i.e., Yazov, Kryuchkov, and Shevardnadze), giving rise to the speculation that the Presidential Council-- or some subcommittee within it-- may take on the work of the Defense Council.

There still remains some controversy over whether the Presidential Council has taken over all the tasks of the Defense Council, as well as whether the Defense Council has truly been disbanded. For instance, Gorbachev did not appoint CPSU leaders--such as Lev Zaikov, Defense Council First Deputy Chairman since November 1989⁵¹--or the head of the Military-Industrial Commission to the Presidential Council. This has raised speculation in the West that the Defense Council continues to exist in some form.

⁴⁸*The Financial Times*, 27 February 1990.

⁴⁹*The Financial Times*, 29 March 1990.

⁵⁰*Moscow Television Service*, 15 March 1990. Reported by FBIS in *Soviet Union: Daily Report*, 16 March 1990, p. 39. [FBIS-SOV-90-052]

⁵¹*Pravda*, 27 November 1989, p. 2. Zaikov was retired "on pension" in August 1990. There is yet no indication that Belousov-- still head of the Commission for Military-Industrial Affairs-- is on the "revitalized" Defense Council.

Gorbachev clarified the status of the Defense Council in a reference to that body soon after its supposed demise. When asked at a televised question and answer session about the posts he holds (CPSU General Secretary, President, Chairman of the RSFSR Party Bureau, and Chairman of the Defense Council), Gorbachev stated that he was still head of the Defense Council, but that this body had been abolished and replaced by a new Defense Council attached to the President's Office.⁵² In addition, Gorbachev stated that the Defense Council and the Presidential Council would soon consider military reform proposals.⁵³ Then, in a major speech from Odessa published in *Sovetskaya rossiya* August 19, 1990, Gorbachev further clarified the status of the Defense Council saying that it had been "renovated" and attached to the Office of the President. No details on the Council's membership-- or its relationship with the Presidential Council-- have yet emerged. The "new" Defense Council may truly be a new organization but--as is the case with the Supreme Soviet--one which uses the name of the old institution.

This new Defense Council will probably act as a U.S.-style National Security Council.⁵⁴ (Lev Zaykov has stated before that the Defense Council should mirror its American counterpart. He also commented at the 28th Party Congress that he supports the establishment of a Defense Council under the Soviet president.⁵⁵) It seems likely that the new Defense Council will be an advisory body to the president, without any of the policy-making responsibilities of its predecessor, since these are now Constitutional responsibilities of the president.

Conclusions: Problems in the Presidential Council?

The Presidential Council is still in an embryonic form. Yakovlev voiced his concern at its slow pace of development in a recent interview. He stated that the Council is still only a staff of advisers and suggested the "mechanisms of presidential power" be implemented more quickly.⁵⁶ Because of weaknesses in the organization, Gorbachev has asked U.S. President George Bush's Chief of Staff, John Sununu, to travel to Moscow to advise him on organizing the presidential bodies. (The Soviets have also sent the USSR Council of Ministers' Administrator of Affairs, Mikhail Shkabardnya, to the White House

⁵²Question and answer session with Mikhail Gorbachev broadcast on Soviet television, 11 April 1990.

⁵³*Pravda*, 12 April 1990, p 1.

⁵⁴See, for example *Pravda*, 10 March 1990, p. 2.

⁵⁵*Pravda*, 4 July 1990, p. 3.

⁵⁶*Pravda*, 23 June 1990, p. 5.

to learn more about the U.S. presidential system.)⁵⁷

The Presidential Council also faces internal problems. For example, its composition of liberal and conservative elements seems to have forced the defeat of any type of radical economic reform, such as Polish-style "shock therapy." By attempting to include representatives from both the conservative and liberal elements of Soviet society, Gorbachev may have created a body which will be unable to work as a team to plan effective and radical reforms--which is a main reason Gorbachev created the Council in the first place. Gorbachev also seems to rely on an informal group of advisers and specialists outside the Council. There are about 20 such informal advisers, including *Literaturnaya gazeta* Editor-in-chief Fedor Burlatsky, economist Nikolay Shmelev, ISKAN⁵⁸ Director Georgiy Arbatov, and Justice Minister Veniamin Yakovlev.⁵⁹ These "outside" advisers may undercut the influence of the Presidential Council.

On the other hand, right now the Presidential Council seems to possess enormous authority, particularly in the areas of Soviet national security concerns. For instance, the Council moved quickly to adopt a policy on Lithuanian independence and ordered economic sanctions against the break-away republic in order to "protect the Constitution of the USSR."⁶⁰ The Council also benefits, in terms of political influence, by the president's constitutional power to declare a state of emergency or martial law; no doubt Gorbachev will rely heavily upon those Council members following nationality and security issues when he considers making such decrees.

In essence, the Presidential Council is a body still in its initial stages of development. The same can be said of the entire newly-reformed and reorganized Soviet political system. It is inevitable that the Presidential Council's influence in Soviet politics will change over time. But by their close association with the powerful new Office of the President, and by their ability to get the ear of Mikhail Gorbachev, the Presidential Council members have the opportunity to set the pace and the direction of Soviet policy, both foreign and domestic.

⁵⁷Radio Liberty Daily Report, 12 June 1990.

⁵⁸Institute of the USA and Canada.

⁵⁹Gorbachev also frequently meets separately with Council members Yakovlev and Shatalin. *The Globe and Mail*, 7 May 1990, p. 7.

⁶⁰See Radio Liberty Daily Report, 10 April 1990 and *Pravda*, 9 April 1990.